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THE BEATITUDES OF JESUS.

THE teaching of Jesus known as the "Sermon on the Mount," of which the Beatitudes constitute the first section, is given the place of honor in the gospel of Matthew. It receives more space than any other discourse, and is placed prominently at the beginning of the book, after introductory matters are recorded. That Jesus did deliver such a discourse upon the true righteousness is altogether probable, and the reports of the discourse which are found in the first and the third gospels are in general agreement as to its chief features. Granted that some of the material found in the two accounts was originally uttered on other occasions, and has been brought into connection with the historical discourse by topical association for practical use, the theme of the original discourse and its development are not destroyed or even obscured. The excerpts which have come down to us of Jesus' great Sermon leave both theme and development clear.

Some scholars have thought to find the theme of the discourse in the passage Matt. 5 : 17-20, in which case the Sermon was either a polemic against the perverse pharisaic interpretation of the Old Testament Law, or else a defense against the pharisaic charge that Jesus destroyed the Law and the Prophets. But this is improbable, for: (1) the Sermon in Luke does not contain the verses found in Matt. 5 : 17-20, and would therefore have no statement of the theme of the discourse; (2) the remainder of Matthew's fifth chapter shows how little, rather than how much, Jesus held in common with the Old Testament system; (3) if the theme lies in 5 : 17-20, there is no logical connection in the discourse for the greater part of the material which Matthew

records; and (4) the situation to which Jesus addresses himself in the Sermon on the Mount would have made unsuitable and unwise a discourse of a negative quality, whether polemic or apologetic.

The theme of the Sermon really lies in the Beatitudes. They stand at the head of the discourse in both the first and the third gospels, and furnish a theme which fairly unites the material given in both accounts. Jesus sought to present in this teaching the ideal life in character and conduct, the true righteousness over against current shallow and perverse conceptions of righteousness. There is abundant probability that Jesus, at some middle point in the Galilean ministry (Luke associates the discourse with the appointment of the twelve apostles), after careful preparation of the people, and to a general company of his followers, would undertake to set forth somewhat specifically and comprehensively the kind of men and women for which the kingdom of God called; what it meant in actual life to become a member of that kingdom; and the kind of righteousness which God required, as contrasted with the current scribal teaching. To develop this definite theme in a great discourse would logically involve a characterization of ideal character and conduct; a comparison of this ideal with the ideal commonly held among his hearers; some illustrations of how this ideal character and conduct would manifest themselves in one's attitude toward God, self, and fellow-men; and earnest injunctions to the actual attainment of this ideal. This is what we have in the Sermon on the Mount, and the Beatitudes present the chief ideas of the theme at its very beginning.

Whether Matthew or Luke presents the more authentic form of the Beatitudes is a question of much difficulty. Some scholars hold that Luke's four Beatitudes are the more original, the eight which Matthew gives being increased in number and expanded in form. This hypothesis, however, is not generally accepted. While the Matthew form of the Beatitudes may not perfectly reproduce the words of Jesus at this point in the discourse, they do seem to convey the spiritual meaning which Jesus had in mind, and all of them are

needed to present the complete view of the ideal life. The Beatitudes as given in the first gospel have always been used by the Christian church as the more satisfying and helpful of the two accounts; and this popular judgment finds much support from a moderate scholarship.

The beatitude type of utterance was not new upon Jesus' lips, for it is found often in the Old Testament. But Jesus made the beatitude his own (as he made the parable his own), and constantly used it as a mode of expression which carried the idea of love rather than of exaction, the idea of persuasion rather than of force. The ideas and phrases of the Beatitudes were largely taken by Jesus from the Old Testament and from current Jewish terminology, to give them in his own teaching a higher import and a greater power.

The phrases "the poor," "the mourners," "the meek," "the hungering and thirsting," "the merciful," "the pure in heart," "the peacemakers," "the persecuted," are stable conceptions and terms of the Old Testament, and of the Judaism of Jesus' day. The same is true of "the kingdom of heaven," "the comfort of the afflicted," "the entering into possession of the earth," "the satisfaction of longing for righteousness and truth," "the seeing God," and "the becoming sons of God." The adoption by Jesus of this religious terminology served to form an essential connection between Jesus' hearers and himself. Yet he did not use it as a mere matter of expediency; rather he used it because he found an essential unity between his own ideas and those of the Hebrew prophets. These phrases in their highest meaning were rooted in fundamental spiritual needs, realities, and aspirations, such as Jesus came to satisfy, to proclaim, and to fulfil.

The Beatitudes consist each of two phrases, the one expressing the condition, the other the result which follows upon it. The one states the character or service to be attained, the other the blessedness of attaining it. The blessedness which Jesus here affirms belongs both to the present and to the future. In one aspect it is eschatological; the endless future of men who attain the

character and perform the service described is assured, as one of perfect happiness and communion with God. But the blessedness which Jesus promised belongs also, and primarily, to the present life. The blessedness of the Beatitudes is that condition of true well-being which results from committing one's self to God with the purpose of living according to His will; and this condition normally produces peace and joy, arising from the consciousness of God's approval and blessing, the feeling of assured present and future well-being.

The Beatitudes present each a special idea, but they are not mutually exclusive. An organic unity joins them all together, and they interlace with one another. Like so many facets of a diamond, they present the ideal life in eight different aspects, they indicate the several characteristics which make up the whole. The order in which the eight sayings are arranged does not appear to be a closely wrought one; they do not seem to present an ascensive or climactic arrangement. Repeated attempts to find a logical consecution and an intricate relation between them have failed.

The detailed interpretation of the eight sayings is a difficult task, as may be seen from the portions of commentaries on Matthew's gospel which attempt it, or in Tholuck's classic work on the Sermon. It can be accomplished only by thorough historical, linguistic, and exegetical study, in accordance with principles of interpretation which are to be derived from a comparison of the entire body of Jesus' teaching, and with full knowledge of the Hebrew religion and literature which Jesus used as a foundation for his work.

It was a most significant way which Jesus chose for setting forth his ideal of life in the Sermon. He did not re-enact the Ten Commandments of Moses, which his people for centuries had regarded as embodying the law of God for man; he did not propose a new table of commandments to take the place of the old. Instead, he presented a series of sayings which pronounce the highest blessings upon those who aspire to the best kind of life. "Blessed are

the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." He gave these Beatitudes with the profound intention of revealing at once the spirit and the substance of the Gospel. Man is not made subservient to an external law forced upon him from without, but is made responsive to a creative light and power within. The criterion by which God judges him is not primarily a standard of external performance, but a standard of internal purpose and aspiration.

The ideal of human life described in the Beatitudes pertains to the fundamental nature of a person, and concerns all men equally. Jesus furnished here a universal ideal, and a universal criterion, according to which a man's success or failure is judged, not by the amount of money he can accumulate, nor by the amount of social distinction he can command, nor by the extent of his intellectual or official achievements; but rather by the essential character which he fashions within himself, and by the service which he renders to his fellow-men. In the Beatitudes Jesus calls men away from the superficial tests and standards which so commonly prevail, to a criterion which concerns the real nature of man, is equally just to all, and stands in relation, not alone to the few years of the present existence, but to the whole of a man's eternal career.